

This column is a forum for sharing the vast range of practical experience accumulated by our membership and not just my favorite boat maintenance topics. It is intended to be the place where you, the reader, can ask technical questions and either obtain direct answers in this column or direction to appropriate reference material.

With this article we'll return to the originally scripted plan and look at the instrumentation (depth, speed, GPS, LORAN, etc.) most of us have, at least to some minimum degree, aboard the boat. In a previous article we looked at the marine compass, possibly the best, most reliable instrument you could hope to find. Of course it doesn't require things that fail like external power, remote sensors, or interface cables, so it's bound to be reliable. Almost all of the other instruments on our boats today are electronic. That's not to say they are unreliable, but because they need a power source, they can become inoperative at the most inopportune time. So before I go any further, a word of warning. Never, ever, ever, ever rely solely on electronic instruments as your only reference when navigating. Electronic instruments are great tools, but like a good hammer, it is only as good as the skilled hand that uses it.

Paper charts are basic reference around which all of our other navigation instruments revolve. Before you go cruising have good charts with you, and make sure they are up to date. Just because you have this year's edition doesn't guarantee they have all the latest changes incorporated into them. Even if you have the latest electronic charting software it will most likely be out of date. If you have an Internet connection go to the First Coast Guard District website <http://www.uscg.mil/d1/navinfo.htm> and download the latest monthly Local Notice to Mariners, or if you don't have a computer, subscribe and have it sent by mail. Many local libraries also have computer work stations that can be used to download the information you select. The monthly edition has information concerning the waterways of the First Coast Guard District, which covers the coastal waters from Eastport, Maine to Shrewsbury, New Jersey.

The website is a superior source of information. Not only is there a link to the Local Notices but as you can see from the table below, a source for many of the other publications you should have onboard including Volume 1 of the Light List and the 1st District Coast Pilot. Another good feature of the site is that as a taxpayer you already paid for the information, the download is free. Printing could be a different story. You're on your own for that!

National Imagery & Mapping Agency (NIMA)	Local Notice to Mariners
Chart Corrections - First District Charts	Light List - Vol 1 (PDF)
Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)	Coast Pilot
Private Aids to Navigation	Links
Special Notice to Mariners	Contact Us

While you are in the site you need to look at the latest Weekly Supplement to the Local Notice to Mariners (LNM). The weekly LNM contains all the new changes and other late breaking updates since publication of the monthly LNM. If you've never looked at this web site, or seen these two documents, you really need to. I know that they look intimidating to someone who has not seen them before, but once you get used to how they are organized, and the information they contain, they can literally be lifesavers if you heed the information in them.

As recreational sailors we don't always pay that much attention to updating our charts. That's not good. Whether you are a 'compass and clock navigator', or have the slickest new electronics, your charts still need to have the right information on them. Searching for a buoy or mark in the fog (we have had a lot of practice doing that these last three years!) whether based on a DR, Loran or GPS, can be real frustrating or down right scary if the buoy has been moved or replaced by a temporary buoy and you didn't know it because your charts are out of date. As an example, if you sail Frenchman or Blue Hill Bay and go looking for the Egg Rock Bell buoy 8 (44-11-01.88N, 068-30-34.19W), it's not there any more.

Some of the other information in the Monthly Edition are special warnings for various harbors, including Boston, Portsmouth NH, and Kennebunkport. These harbors now have special security zones in force. The Monthly Edition references the charts and other information sources so that you can stay out of trouble while trying to enjoy a cruise. Additionally it has information on the bridge repairs on SR27 Bridge across the Townsend Gut and the new operating schedule necessitated by the repairs. Depending on your summer plans, this could be very worthwhile information.

The Weekly Supplement # 19/05 has updated information for chart 13283, Cape Neddick Harbor to Isles of Shoals. It corrects the VAR data to 2005 values and changes the annual decrease for several compass roses on the chart. I don't know about you but I like to have this type of information.

The nautical chart is the basis of navigation on the water. No matter how basic or advanced your instrumentation is you need accurate charts. Be prepared. Take a look at the Monthly and Weekly Local Notice to Mariners and update your charts before you get underway.

Racing Numbers

The Race Committee is asking skippers to use sloop numbers for racing. Numbers do not have to be permanently attached to sails, they can be attached to shrouds. Numbers should be large enough to be read from a reasonable distance.